

# *Iowa Outdoors*

**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**[www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov)**

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**July 15, 2008**

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## **GREEN VALLEY STATE PARK TO RECEIVE MAJOR FACELIFT**

CRESTON – Green Valley State Park will undergo a major transformation over the next two years, essentially resulting in a new lake and a much-improved campground.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources fisheries staff began lowering the lake July 9. It is anticipated the lake will be inaccessible by boat, and that all marker buoys and docks will be removed, by Friday. The fishery will be eliminated in September to remove carp and yellow bass. All other park activities—including camping, cabin rental and fishing—will remain open in the meantime.

Gary Sobotka, area fisheries biologist leading the lake improvement project, said while the water level is down, he plans to install water quality improvements in the watershed, deepen some of the sediment dikes and add stabilization structures around the lake. He said they will add fish-attracting structures around the lake and perform routine maintenance on the fishing jetties. There will also be some concrete work on the emergency spillway.

“The lake restoration program will allow us to do more extensive work, remove a lot more sediment and improve the water quality tremendously,” Sobotka said.

“We should have the infrastructure in place for a self sustaining fishery for several years. But the key is getting the carp out of the lake,” Sobotka said. “Yellow bass are also a problem. We cannot get along with yellow bass in this part of the state.”

He said the lake will be restocked this fall with largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish and crappie. Channel catfish should begin showing up the year after renovation and other species will begin later that same year, but everything should be going well in year three. The lake work is expected to be completed in the winter, then the lake will be allowed to refill.

Major campground renovation and park development work will begin sometime after the 2008 camping season. Scheduled work includes increasing the size of the individual sites, adding rock to the camping pads and living spaces, installing new grills and increasing the electrical service to 50 amps. At least 10 of the 90 electrical sites will offer full hookups. Since the new campsites will be larger, there will be fewer non-electric sites.

The increased space between campsites will create a much more user-friendly environment, said Angela Corio, landscape architect for the DNR's State Parks Bureau. Less congestion also means a safer environment for vehicle traffic and pedestrians.

The schedule calls for the campsite work to be finished by mid summer 2009.

Beginning in the fall of 2009, an additional family shower building will be constructed. The family shower building will have individual outside entrances for each room and each room will have a toilet as well as a shower. This new family shower building will be unisex.

New latrines will replace the pit latrines at the boat ramp and campground. An additional camping cabin and latrine will be added to the area where the two cabins are located. The cabin is being funded by grants and donations from Endow Union County, High Lakes Alliance and the DNR.

The park improvement includes paving the one mile trail connection from Mitchell Marsh north of Creston, on north to the park that will connect Green Valley State Park to Creston.

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## **DNR DIRECTOR KICKS OFF PUBLIC FORUM SCHEDULE WEDNESDAY IN MILFORD**

MILFORD – Richard Leopold, director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, will be holding public forums around Iowa starting with the lodge at Gull Point State Park Wednesday, July 16.

“I’m looking forward to sharing some of the important initiatives underway within the department, but more importantly, I really want to hear from Iowa’s citizens.

One thing I am particularly proud of is the rapport that the DNR has with the public. This is a relationship we value highly within the DNR,” said Leopold.

The public forum begins at 6 p.m. with Director Leopold outlining the department’s top 10 priorities, work being done to develop environmental indicators for the state, providing an update on sustainable funding for natural resources and discussion of local issues. Another hour-and-a-half will be devoted to answering questions from the public.

Other public forums scheduled for Director Leopold are as follows:

Wednesday, July 23  
Walnut Woods State Park lodge  
Des Moines

Thursday, July 31  
Pine Lake State Park lodge  
Eldora

Thursday, August 7  
Lake Keomah State Park lodge  
Oskaloosa

Thursday, August 21  
Lake Wapello State Park lodge  
Drakesville

Wednesday, August 27  
Backbone State Park Beach Lodge  
Dundee

Thursday, September 4  
Viking Lake State Park  
Stanton

For more information, contact Tammie Krausman at 515-402-8763.

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## **ONE-OF-A-KIND DEER HUNT CELEBRATES CAMARADERIE, HUNTING EXPERIENCE**

EARLHAM, Iowa – Roger Erpelding had always wanted to go hunting. For years, he listened to the hunting stories his brothers and brother-in-law would tell and wished he was along for the adventure. The 57-year-old Windsor Heights man, blind since birth, finally got his chance in 2006 when he shot a doe with the help of a guide

during a special youth and disabled deer hunt, southeast of Earlham. It was one of his proudest moments when he served a grilled roast from that deer to his family for Christmas dinner.

The Whitetail Challenge is a doe-only deer hunt for youth and disabled hunters offered by Ron Mason Jr., and Steve and Penny Radakovich, who as partners operate North Branch Wildlife Group, a guide and outfitting business on 1,000 acres of their adjoining properties in Madison County. The area, which Mason Jr. says looks more like Montana than Iowa, has welcomed youth and disabled deer hunters on the last weekend of the special youth and disabled deer season since 2003.

Working with his guide Dave Hyler, who was shouldering and aiming the gun, Erpelding squeezed the trigger. Hyler called the organizers to say a deer was down, and volunteers were dispatched to track it down.

“It was happy times,” Erpelding said. “Dave was excited and I was excited. I had always wanted to hunt. It was wonderful to say this is something I did. It was my doing.” He participated in 2007, but did not harvest a deer.

Erpelding said if he is available, he will be there again.

“I really enjoy it, I really do. You come out here and you don’t want to go home again. It’s a wonderful experience,” Erpelding said. He said he is so thankful for the event and that it is run so well. “Just top notch, they are A-plus. Can’t thank them enough. It’s just beyond words,” he said.

### **“... you need to live after you’re released”**

Jim Kramer was an avid outdoors man who hunted all his life. Then his life changed forever when in 2000 the strong man with a booming voice from Windsor Heights found himself lying in a hospital bed after a motorcycle accident left him paralyzed from the chest down. He was about to be discharged, newly paralyzed and facing all kinds of new life challenges, when he met Dan Kleen.

Dan Kleen broke his neck diving into a pool 21 years ago and has been in a wheelchair ever since. During his nine month rehabilitation in the Younkers Rehabilitation Unit at Iowa Methodist Medical Center, a guy came in to talk to him out of the blue.

“It made an impact on me,” said Kleen, executive director of the Iowa Off Highway Vehicle Association and president of the National Off Highway Vehicle Conservation Council. The hospital now calls Kleen on occasion to visit with patients and talk about their future.

“He said ‘you need to live after you’re released,’” Kramer said. Kramer had never met Kleen before but the two visited in the hospital and after his release, Kleen

introduced him to Ron Mason Jr. They struck up a friendship and Kramer has been a part of every hunt and had bagged a deer each year except 2007.

He said he has been to other disabled hunter events, but this Whitetail Challenge is by far the best. All you have to do is get there, he said. The rest is taken care of.

“You know who your guide is and are encouraged to talk to your guide ahead of time. You don’t have to worry about looking out of place, or where to go to the bathroom. Will they have food I can’t eat?” he said. “It’s nice to go to someplace and not be stared at; to hang with other people who understand what we go through. It’s great to go out there and know everything is covered. They don’t guarantee it, but I guarantee that when you show up, all your needs will be met in a relaxed, fun atmosphere.”

The event means more than going hunting to Kramer. He sees the real value in networking with others and learning about the obstacles they have faced and how they overcame them.

“You don’t learn anything at the hospital,” Kramer said. “I’ve learned 90 percent of what I know from other people like me at other events. It’s really about meeting the people.”

The event can pick up the participants even if they can’t actually partake in the hunt. Just seeing others who are doing it is rewarding, Mason Jr. said. The hunt started accepting youth hunters who have their father or other mentor serve as their guide.

### **Preparation key to event success**

Work begins at least two months ahead of time. Organizers send out invitations, line up entertainment, recruit volunteers, set up deer blinds and assign teams of volunteers to work with hunters who are disabled or have limited mobility.

The Whitetail Challenge begins accepting applications in July and all participants must submit an application. Information is available online at <http://www.millcreekbranch.net/menu.htm> or by calling Mason Jr. at 515-834-9111. They have not really turned anyone down, he said.

It takes three or four volunteers for each disabled hunter to make the event happen, plus volunteers to cook and feed the hunters, volunteers and any family members along. In 2007, there were 60 volunteers for four youth and 12 handicap hunters.

Mason Jr. said the group works hard to keep the cost down by holding fundraisers to help offset expenses. “It’s a lot of work, as you can imagine,” Mason, Jr. said. “It’s extremely rewarding. It’s the most rewarding thing I’ve ever done.”

There have been 65 participants in the hunt, including a boy who started as a shy 9-year-old in a heavy motorized chair who has shot three deer since the event began, as well as the 57-year-old Erpelding and just about everyone in between.

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## **MIDWESTERN HAWK HEADS CELEBRATE PEREGRINES' RETURN**

By Lowell Washburn

**“It’s been an incredible year for peregrine falcons. We now have more peregrines nesting back on natural cliffs than we do on buildings.” Bob Anderson, Director, Raptor Resource Project**

**WAUKON JUNCTION---**Assembled along the stone base of a towering Mississippi River cliff, a hopeful collection of falconers peer skyward. Traveling from across four Midwestern states, the congregation of raptor enthusiasts arrived in Iowa last Saturday, all hoping to catch a glimpse of the elusive peregrine falcon--alive and wild in its native habitat.

Although once listed as a common inhabitant of the Mississippi River bluffs, the careless post World War II use of DDT pesticides had a devastating effect on peregrine populations. By the late 1960s, DDT contamination had completely eradicated the species in Iowa as well as from the entire eastern half of the U.S.

Fortunately, times are changing. Thanks to an aggressive conservation effort that included the release of young captive-bred falcons to the wild, this dynamic species is currently staging a dramatic comeback.

For those possessing patience and a good pair of binoculars, the chance of seeing a modern-day, free flying peregrine is all but assured. For Saturday’s peregrine watchers, the wait was amazingly short. The first falcon was spotted within six minutes.

“Here comes one now,” announced Raptor Resource Project Director Bob Anderson. Based at Decorah, Anderson’s Raptor Project has long aided in the peregrine’s recovery and is currently monitoring the bird’s return to historic Mississippi River nest sites.

As if on cue, the speeding falcon turned and then passed directly above the earthbound onlookers. Raising his binoculars, Anderson quickly confirmed that the bird was a young-of-the-year male--one of three youngsters produced at the Waukon Junction cliff this summer.

“This has really been a remarkable year for peregrines,” said Anderson. “So far, we’ve documented peregrine activity on 23 separate Mississippi River cliffs, which is a gain of five new territories over last year.”

“It really is amazing. Less than 10 years ago, there were no peregrine falcons nesting on natural cliff sites, but all that has changed,” said Anderson. “Today, the cliff birds outnumber the ‘city falcons’ that nest on skyscrapers and other (urban) structures. The ultimate goal of this recovery has been to return falcons to historic cliff sites, and now they’ve accomplished that.”

But although there is ample cause for celebration, Anderson cautions that modern-day peregrines are not necessarily home free.

Midwestern peregrines have been the most studied bird population in the U.S., notes Anderson. Falcons nesting on natural cliff ledges are exposed to “real world” hazards. By analyzing data obtained from ongoing leg band readings, Raptor Resource Project observers are discovering that Mississippi River peregrine populations have a much faster turnover than their longer lived urban counterparts.

“When first attempting the river recovery, we assumed that great horned owls would pose one of the greatest threats to peregrine survival,” says Anderson. “We were wrong. Instead we’ve discovered that peregrines are more than capable of dealing with the danger of horned owls. Adult peregrines will also show aggression toward birds like red-tailed hawks and bald eagles, and will drive them away from nest sites. But show peregrines a horned owl, and the aggression becomes intense. They just turn into Tasmanian devils, and owls don’t stand a chance of taking their youngsters. Right now, rain and raccoons seem to be the limiting factor on peregrine eggs and young.”

Included among last weekend’s journeying crowd of “Midwestern Hawk Heads” was Ross Dirks, owner of northwest Iowa’s Dickinson County Animal Clinic. A charter member of the Iowa Peregrine Falcon Recovery Team, Dirks actively sponsored the release of young peregrines to Mississippi River bluffslands.

“This is just an incredible event,” said Dirks. “Now I can say that I’ve actually been to the Mississippi River and have seen wild peregrines nesting on a natural cliff in Iowa.”

“When the river recovery work began, we all knew that there would be risks and no one knew for sure if this could work. But now, the peregrine falcon has returned,” Dirks said. “To have this species back on historic cliffs in Iowa is just an amazing accomplishment. It’s just amazing.”

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**EDITOR’S NOTE: Peregrine photos are available by contacting Kati Bainter at [kati.bainter@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:kati.bainter@dnr.iowa.gov).**

## **VETERAN DNR RESEARCHER NAMED FISHERIES BIOLOGIST OF THE YEAR**

DES MOINES—A longtime biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources is being recognized nationally for his work in fisheries and fish conservation.

Don Bonneau, fisheries research supervisor, was named Fisheries Biologist of the Year by the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) for his commitment to fisheries conservation both on a state and regional level. Specifically, Bonneau was recognized for his recent work on the DNR's new Lake Restoration Program.

"His greatest contributions have come recently and are a result of his vision for the future and dedication to using sound science for making decisions," said Marion Conover, chief of the fisheries bureau. "Don laid the groundwork for funding the new Lake Restoration Program."

The program ties water quality, economics and quality of life issues into lake restoration.

"Don initiated a five-year study of 127 public lakes that assessed the water quality, technical feasibility of restoration, potential economic benefits, use by Iowans and local interest and involvement," Conover went on to say. "The results of this study led to the prioritization of 35 candidate lakes for restoration."

One of the success stories cited by MAFWA as a result of the program was a comprehensive \$4 million restoration project at 140-acre Lake Ahquabi. The payback in terms of recreation benefits took only two years. For example, fishing at Lake Ahquabi increased more than three-fold. This, along with the science based prioritization of lakes, resulted in the program receiving dedicated funding of \$8.5 million annually in 2007, 2008 and 2009. In that period, seven restoration projects have been completed and 15 are in progress.

Bonneau has been supervisor of the fisheries research section since 1973. Prior to that, he spent three years as the Southwest Iowa District Fisheries Manager. He has a bachelor of science degree in biology from Fort Hays State University and a master of science in fish and wildlife biology from Kansas State University. He is a member of the American Fisheries Society (AFS) and North American Lake Management Society (NALMS).

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